DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 839 HE 029 434

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TITLE	Outcomes Assessment in the Middle States Region. A Report on the 1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey.
INSTITUTION	Commission on Higher Education, Philadelphia, Pa. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.
PUB DATE	Jul 96
NOTE	24p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market St., Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrators; Change Strategies; College Faculty; *College Outcomes Assessment; College Programs; Educational Assessment; Financial Problems; Higher Education; *Long Range Planning; Needs Assessment; Regional Programs; Surveys

ABSTRACT

The Commission on Higher Education conducted a survey in 1995 of 495 member institutions of higher education, most in the Mid-Atlantic region, to determine their progress with outcomes assessment. Sixty-eight percent of the institutions responded, disclosing that: (1) more than half do not have an institution-wide plan for outcomes assessment though more than one-third have had such a plan for 3 or more years; (2) most institutions with a plan incorporate direct measures of institutional effectiveness, but few emphasize direct measures of teaching and learning; (3) the majority of institutions without a plan have completed no more than two or three of the nine steps considered prerequisite to developing a plan; (4) faculty and academic administrators tend to be involved in, respectively, developing assessment plans and continuous administration of those plans; (5) faculty resistance and a lack of sufficient human and financial resources are the chief barriers to implementing new assessment activities or sustaining existing initiatives; and (6) the Commission could be most helpful by publishing guidelines and conducting workshops and seminars to provide examples of effective assessment programs and strategies. (Author/MAH)

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ED 399 839

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Outcomes Assessment in the Middle States Region

A Report on the 1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey

July 1996

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Abstract

The Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, conducted a survey in 1995 of 495 member institutions of higher education to determine the progress being made with outcomes assessment in the region, and 68 percent of the institutions responded. Over one-half of the respondents (57 percent) do not have an institution-wide plan for outcomes assessment, although over one-third (34 percent) have had one for three or more years. Most institutions with a plan incorporate direct measures of institutional effectiveness, but few emphasize direct measures of teaching and learning. The majority of institutions without a plan have completed no more than two or three of the nine steps considered prerequisite to developing a plan. Faculty tend to be fully involved in developing assessment plans at most institutions, while academic administrators tend to be fully involved in the continuous administration of those plans. However, faculty resistance and a lack of sufficient human and financial resources are the chief barriers to implementing new assessment activities or sustaining existing initiatives. Respondents also indicated that the Commission could be most helpful by publishing guidelines and by conducting workshops and seminars to provide examples of effective assessment programs and strategies.

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The Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools accredits institutions of higher education in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, The Republic of Panama, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and other locations abroad.

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Outcomes Assessment in the Middle States Region

A Report on the 1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey
(July 1996)

A survey was mailed in May 1995 to the chief executive officers of the 495 colleges and universities that are members of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Of these institutions, 337 (68 percent) responded to the survey.

This preliminary report describes the respondents, the extent to which asssessment plans exist in the region, the measures and instruments that institutions utilize, institutional readiness to develop a plan, the ways in which institutions utilize asssessment findings, and the participants in the assessment process. Two types of questions solicited open-ended responses which are also analyzed in this report, one identifying difficulties or barriers faced in institutionalizing a plan and the other asking how the Commission might best assist institutions.

Respondents and Their Plans

The survey identified institutions by Carnegie type, size of enrollment, and public or private sponsorship, and it identified respondents by position title. The survey also was designed in two parts: one requested data on the information needs of institutions that have not yet developed an outcomes assessment plan, and the other examined several aspects of assessment at institutions that have implemented a formal program.

Respondents were broadly representative of the seven Carnegie types adopted by the Commission for its purposes in the Middle States region. Respondents in each type approximated 68 percent of the total number of institutions in the corresponding type for the region as a whole. They were similarly representative of the public (67 percent) and independent (66 percent) sectors.

Over one-half of the institutions (57 percent) have no outcomes assessment plan (Figure 1). However, 18 percent of the institutions have had a plan for five years or more, 16 percent have operated with a plan for three to four years, and 9 percent have had a plan for one to two years.

Public institutions were more likely to have an outcomes assessment plan, representing 54 percent of the sample. In contrast, only 34 percent of the independent institutions in the sample had a plan.

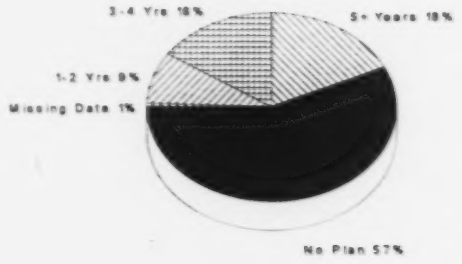
The preponderance of public institutions among those that had a plan does not necessarily mean that assessment plans exist *because of* a state requirement. In fact, the responses to the question asking if their state required assessment were inconclusive. Approximately 45 percent of the public institutions that have a plan and 69 percent of the private institutions indicated that their state did not require assessment. In addition, most of the states identified as requiring assessment appear on the list of states identified by others as not requiring assessment. It also is not clear that the requirement applies only to certain types of institutions, since most of the seven Carnegie types used in the survey appear on both lists. It is possible, therefore, that the individuals who responded to the survey simply did not know the correct answer to the question.

Figure 1

Institution-wide Assessment Plans

Percentage of All Institutions

(n=337)



The individuals assigned to respond to the survey were fairly evenly divided among those at the vice presidential level (25 percent), directors of institutional research and/or planning (29 percent), and deans (23 percent). Only a few survey respondents were chief executive officers (7 percent), provosts (9 percent) or department heads and faculty (6 percent).

Figure 2

Outcomes Data Collected

Percentage of Institutions with Plans
(n=143)

Head Counting	
Graduation/Retention/Attrition	94
Enrollment Data	90
Prof/Grad School Acceptance Rates	46
Data from Articulation Agreements	23
Survey Data	
Alumni Surveys	89
Student Satisfaction Surveys	85
Classroom Surveys	72
Campus Climate Surveys	66
Values/Ethics Surveys	22
Student Motivation Surveys	18
Test Data	
Licensure Examinations	73
Nationally Normed Diagnostic Tests	64
Program Completion Tests	60
Locally Designed Diagnostic Tests	58
Skills Tests	48
Locally Designed Remediation Follow-up	27
Locally Designed General Skills	30
Nationally Normed Remediation Follow-up	27
Nationally Normed General Skills	22
Other	
Exit Interviews	62
Portfolio Assessment	47
Case Studies	12

Measures and Instruments

Most institutions that have an outcomes assessment plan utilize some of the more direct measures of institutional effectiveness, but few emphasize direct measures of teaching and learning.

Direct versus Indirect Measures

Data are most routinely gathered on graduation, retention, and attrition rates as well as enrollment, all of which typically involve counting the number of individuals who are processed through a particular institution or groups of institutions forming a system of higher education (Figure 2). A similarly large number of institutions focus on various types of client-satisfaction surveys, including alumni and students who comment on their classroom and various other campus experiences.

To the extent that direct measures of teaching and learning are utilized, they typically involve licensure examinations, nationally normed diagnostic tests, and program completion tests.

Other more direct measures of teaching and learning are utilized less often in the development of an assessment plan, such as examinations in discipline content areas, basic skills, higher order skills, vocational or career skills, and student portfolios.

National versus Local Tests

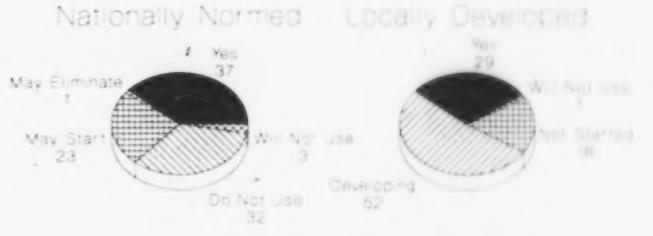
The survey results also indicated that institutions without an outcomes assessment plan nevertheless do utilize *some* assessment instruments. It specifically asked institutions to indicate whether they utilized nationally-normed and locally-developed tests and, if not, whether they are considering using or eliminating them, or whether they simply do not use them. The data indicate that while institutions frequently rely on nationally-normed tests, a number of them have significant experience with and interest in locally-developed instruments (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Use of National and Local Tests

Percentage of Institutions without Plan

(n=192)



1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey, CHE/MSA

Before a plan is in place, a greater number of institutions currently use nationally-normed tests (38 percent) than locally-developed tests (29 percent). However, more institutions are in the process of actually developing tests locally (52 percent) than are at the stage of considering whether or not to use nationally-normed tests (23 percent), which indicates that institutions without a plan have a significant interest in locally-developed instruments.

The interest in certain types of locally-developed tests also is strong once a plan is in place. At institutions with a plan, the interest in locally-developed instruments is emphasized for

measuring remediation follow-up (27 percent nationally-normed v. 45 percent locally-developed) and general skills (22 percent nationally-normed v. 30 percent locally-developed). However, for diagnostic purposes, institutions tend to rely more heavily on nationally-normed tests than those that are locally-developed.

On the other hand, nearly one-third of the institutions without a plan (32 percent) do not currently utilize nationally-normed tests, and 18 percent have not started to develop tests locally. Only a handful indicated that they *will not* utilize nationally-normed instruments (3 percent) or locally-developed tests or surveys (1 percent).

While the Commission on Higher Education recognizes that there are significant issues of validity and reliability with some direct measures of teaching and learning, the Commission has consistently required institutions to develop a plan for outcomes assessment that strives for "the effective assessment of institutional, program, and student learning outcomes" (*Characteristics of Excellence*, 1994, p. 4), utilizing "both quantitative and qualitative data which demonstrate congruence between the institution's mission, goals, and objectives and the actual outcomes of...educational programs and activities" (p. 17). The purpose of such assessment always is to improve teaching and learning and to measure overall institutional effectiveness (pp. 16-17).

Program Review

The Commission also expects institutions to engage in program review and make the information gleaned from this process an important part of any outcomes assessment plan. Therefore, the survey asked all institutions, both with and without a plan, about the relationship between regular program review and assessment planning.

In spite of ambiguities in the question on program review that was addressed to institutions without a plan, it appears that 39 percent will include outcomes assessment in their plan, and 44 percent are still considering its inclusion. The questions on program review addressed to institutions with a plan were more direct, indicating that 83 percent have included program review in their outcomes assessment plan. At these institutions, an average of 65 to 79 percent of the programs at each institution have been assessed at least once.

Research institutions reported that, on average, 80 to 99 percent of their programs had been reviewed at least once. Two-year, specialized, comprehensive, and proprietary institutions—in that order and with minor differences—had an average of 65 to 79 percent of their programs had been reviewed at least once. Liberal arts institutions had reviewed an average of 50 to 64 percent of their programs, while doctoral institutions had reviewed the least number: 20 to 34 percent.

Readiness to Develop a Plan

The survey was particularly concerned with the level of effort that institutions without a plan have made in nine aspects of assessment which should be completed in order to set the stage for developing an assessment plan. These elements include completing an inventory of the institution's operative statements of mission, goals, and objectives; having approved statements covering the hierarchy of goals; developing an inventory of the assessment instruments and activities already in place in the institution; evaluating how well these instruments and/or activities are working; evaluating the extent to which data produced from existing activities or instruments have been analyzed and utlized; deciding what areas should be measured beyond those already evaluated; deciding who will respond to the tests or surveys (e.g. students/alumni; all/random sample, etc.); deciding whether to include program review in the assessment plan; and deciding how and when the test data or survey results are to be processed and analyzed.

The principal finding is that while institutions have completed some of the more mechanical tasks, such as developing inventories of instruments in use, they tend not to have evaluated the effectiveness of using those instruments (Figure 4). In addition, while they may have decided that program reviews will be included in any future assessment plan, they have not tackled the more thorny question of what outcomes still need to be measured, beyond those that are already being measured.

Figure 4

Essential Steps in Preparation for Developing an Assessment Plan

Percentage of Institutions without A Plan
(n=192)

	Completed		In Progress		Have not Started	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Have an inventory of operative statements	89	46.4	90	46.9	13	6.8
Have decided whether to include program review	75	39.1	85	44.3	32	16.7
Have an inventory of current assessment instruments activities	65	33.9	89	46.4	36	18.8
Have decided who will respond to tests/surveys	44	22.9	106	55.2	41	21.4
Have approved statements of goals (institutional, program, course)	39	20.3	127	66.1	26	13.5
Have evaluated the extent to which data from existing activities have been analyzed or utilized	23	12.0	96	50.0	70	36.5
Have decided how/when test results are to be processed and analyzed	20	10.4	98	51.0	72	37.5
Have evaluated how well these instruments/activities work	18	9.4	96	50.0	76	39.6
Have decided what areas should be measured beyond those we already evaluate	17	8.9	109	56.8	63	32.8

The six proprietary institutions that do not have a plan, representing 67 percent of all proprietary institutions in the region, appear to be in the most advantageous position to develop an assessment plan in that they have completed an average of 6.8 of the nine preliminary steps (Figure 5). The six research institutions without a plan, which represent 38 percent of all research institutions in the region, have completed the least number of steps (1.8) that are necessary to begin developing a plan.

Figure 5

Number of Preliminary Steps Completed

[At Institutions without a Plan]

Type of Institution	Steps Completed [Maximum = 9]
Proprietary	6.8
Specialized	3.6
Two-year	2.9
Doctoral	2.7
Liberal Arts	2.5*
Comprehensive	2.5*
Research	1.8

**Note:* While both liberal arts and comprehensive institutions had completed the same mean number of steps, liberal arts institutions were placed higher on the list because they had a lower standard deviation and, therefore, the mean was a slightly more accurate description of the group's status.

Uses for Assessment Data

Three questions asked about the ways in which institutions utilized their assessment data. One involved the extent to which assessment findings have led the institution to modify its goals and objectives, the second was intended to determine if institutions planned to incorporate assessment data in the self-study process, and the third inquired about the dissemination of findings to the campus community.

Modifying Goals and Objectives

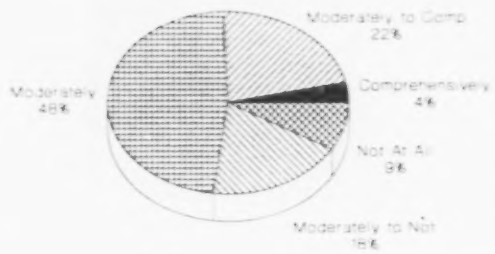
Only a handful (4 percent) indicated that their assessments have led them to modify their goals and objectives comprehensively (Figure 6). Most (88 percent) spanned the moderate categories, ranging from moderately-to-comprehensively, moderately, and moderately-to-not at all. Only a few (9 percent) reported in the absolutely "Not at all" category.

Figure 6

Assessment Modifying Goals

Percentage of Institutions with Plan

(n=141)



1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey, CHE/MSA

It could be said that selecting any category of "moderately," as opposed to "comprehensively," suggests that institutions have certain reservations about the use of assessment data. It is not known, however, whether this is simply from a lack of information about instruments and strategies that are available or from a lack of confidence in the validity or reliability of existing measures as they apply to an institution's type or its unique mission, goals, and objectives.

The Self-Study Process

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine if institutions planned to incorporate assessment data in their self-study process, because there were ambiguities between the texts of the questions and the scope of the response scales, and these responses were discarded.

Dissemination to the Campus Community

The question addressed to institutions without a plan also produced ambiguous responses, and these data were discarded. However, a different question addressed to institutions with a plan was more precise. It asked, in a fixed-response format, how summaries of assessment results are communicated to the campus community. A large majority of institutions with a plan (83 percent) noted that they communicated with the campus by formal report or reports, 59 percent did so informally or selectively, and 58 percent did so during their Middle States self-study.

It is noteworthy, however, that nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of the institutions with a plan—representing 10 percent of all institutions in the region—communicated summaries of assessment findings only in response to individual requests. The institutions in this group represented a diverse range of institutions in the region. They came from six of the seven types of institutions and were located in four of the seven states or other political jurisdictions in the region, and nearly two-thirds (62 percent) were public institutions. They also were smaller institutions: nearly two-thirds (65 percent) had fewer than 5,000 students, and an additional 21 percent had from 5,001 to 10,000 students.

This restricted dissemination of assessment results is a clear breach of the letter and spirit of the Commission's standards for accreditation in *Characteristics of Excellence*, which treat "honesty, openness, and concern for...constituents" as a reflection on the integrity with which an institution "communicates and interacts with its constituencies and the public" (*Characteristics*, 1994, pp. 5–6). This ethical issue is further reinforced in one of the Commission's policy statements, "Collegiality and Public Communication in the Accreditation Process" (*Portfolio of Policy and Procedures*). While 10 percent of a population may not be a large number for some purposes, its weight is far more significant when ethics and integrity are involved.

Participants in the Process

Three questions asked respondents at institutions without a plan to estimate the involvement or anticipated involvement of faculty, academic administrators, and institutional researchers in *developing* an institution-wide assessment plan. Three additional questions asked institutions with a plan to estimate the involvement of these personnel in the *continuous administration* of the plan. A final set of questions for institutions with a plan offered a list of campus constituents

and asked who is involved in analyzing assessment results.

Development vs. Continuous Administration. The data indicate that faculty are fully involved in developing assessment plans at a greater number of institutions than they are in the continuous administration of plans, where they are more moderately involved (Figure 7). A similar scenario applies to academic administrators (Figure 8). However, the role of institutional researchers remains fairly stable, whether the institution has or does not have an assessment plan (Figure 9).

These findings remain consistent when we control for the position title of respondent, indicating the presence of a collegial consensus, rather than the particular perspectives of either academic administrators, institutional researchers, or those more closely involved with faculty.

Analysis of Results. The leading group involved in analyzing the results of tests or surveys is academic administrators (92 percent of the institutions). They are followed closely by faculty committees (83 percent), individual faculty members (74 percent), and institutional researchers (72 percent). Least involved in analyzing outcomes are members of the Board of Trustees (28 percent), students (12 percent), area employers (8 percent), and alumni/ae (3 percent).

At the various types of institutions, the distribution of responsibility for analyzing assessment results is reasonably consistent region-wide, but there are a few major differences. For example, institutional researchers appear to have an extremely low profile at proprietary institutions, analyzing the data in only 33 percent of those institutions. The responsibility for analysis at proprietary institutions falls on academic administrators and faculty committees, who are involved at 100 percent of those institutions. Liberal arts institutions, on the other hand, involve institutional researchers slightly less than the average (57 percent) and two-year institutions involve them slightly more (83 percent).

There are also different responsibilities at institutions of various sizes. For example, in small institutions, having enrollments of up to 5,000 students, faculty committees and academic administrators share most of the responsibility, and institutional researchers have a much smaller role (Figure 10). At institutions with more than 15,000 students, the responsibility shifts more clearly to academic administrators and institutional researchers, with individual faculty and faculty committees having smaller roles.

Figure 7
Perception of Faculty Involvement in Outcomes Assessment
Percentage of Institutions

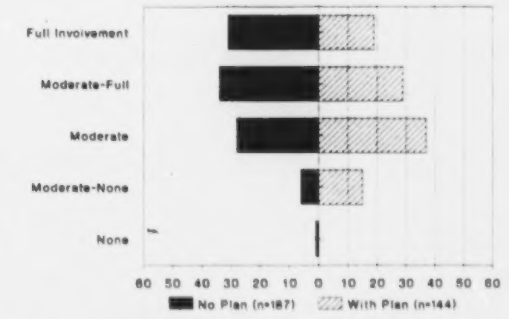


Figure 8
Perception of Administrators Involvement in Outcomes Assessment
Percentage of Institutions

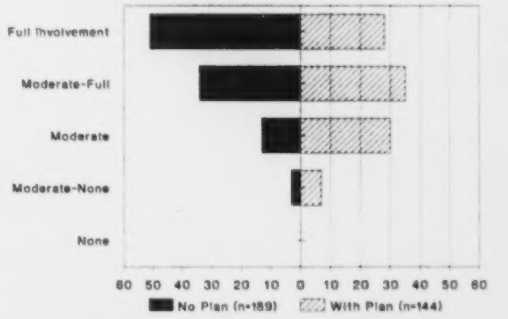


Figure 9
Perception of Inst. Research Involvement in Outcomes Assessment
Percentage of Institutions

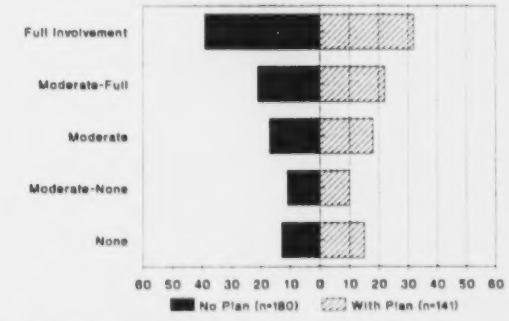


Figure 10
Involvement in Analyzing Results, by Size of Enrollment
Percentage of Institutions with Plan

Students	Faculty	Faculty Committees	Acad. Admin.	Institutional Researchers
1 to 5,000	75	82	93	64
5,001 to 10,000	72	90	90	86
10,001 to 15,000	82	91	100	91
15,000 or more	71	71	100	100

Barriers to Institutionalizing a Plan

Faculty and resources, both financial and human, are most frequently cited as the principal barriers to implementing an institution-wide plan for outcomes assessment. Other barriers include time constraints and a lack of awareness about the value of assessment and effective assessment instruments and strategies.

Two questions solicited open-ended responses identifying the barriers that institutions face and how they overcome these barriers. There were 162 responses from institutions without a plan and 152 from those that had a plan.

Institutions without a Plan

Faculty and resources were the primary barriers noted by institutions without a plan, although conflicting priorities and other demands on faculty also were noted.

Faculty. At least 50 (31 percent) of the responses from these institutions cited faculty as the number one barrier to institutionalizing outcomes assessment on campus. This response came from public and private institutions of all types and in all states of the region. Illustrative of this position was that of a public comprehensive college in Pennsylvania: [There is] "uncertainty and resistance—fear that assessment will unfairly measure progress or concentrate too much on quantitative data." Faculty anxiety over the potential misuse of assessment data was the concern of a public comprehensive college in New Jersey. Yet another view was often heard: "Convincing faculty that assessment is not just the most recent educational fad; that it can be integrated into the program and promote increased learning.

Institutions appeared quite candid in their responses. For example, one institution stated that most faculty perceive the concept of an institutional assessment plan as "an unnecessary, intrusive, bureaucratic activity."

Resources. Second to faculty resistance as the barrier to implementation of outcomes assessment plans was resources. Over 26 institutions responded that resources, mainly financial, were an impediment to beginning the assessment process. A two-year public community college stated that lack of human and financial resources was critical. Another two-year college cited decreased state and local funding sources. One public comprehensive university stated succinctly that the major difficulty was cost. Another institution, a public, comprehensive university from New York was more pessimistic, "mostly funding, a problem that we will not overcome". And finally, a private liberal arts college related that the problem it had in this regard was lack of staffing, time, and money for assessment.

Overcoming the Barriers. A major public research university identified barriers to institution-wide outcomes assessment and spoke of how their institution is addressing those barriers. The difficulties identified by this institution are ones that many large complex universities might encounter. While the institution claims that it does not have an institution-wide plan, it indicates that it has outcomes assessment embedded in academic programs. One barrier has been the demand on leadership and faculty to concentrate on other institutional priorities and accountability mandates. The recision of state funding has had an impact on budget priorities. In addition, the decentralized structures of the institution make an institution-wide plan more complicated.

The university is overcoming these difficulties. For example, the state is releasing funds for the assessment of learning outcomes, has appointed an associate provost for planning to develop and implement a university-wide assessment plan, and has established an Assessment Advisory Committee to oversee university-wide assessment activities.

Many institutions shared the ways in which they were attempting to overcome the barriers previously-discussed. A private liberal arts college in New York established faculty committees and participates in Pew Roundtable discussions as a way to engage faculty. A private two-year college in Pennsylvania sends a faculty representative to a conference of the American Association for Higher Education to gather relevant materials for distribution to all faculty. This representative is a senior professor who also chairs the internal faculty outcomes assessment committee. A public two-year college in Pennsylvania indicates that it has asked faculty to develop syllabi that include outcomes, and this institution now provides in-service workshops on writing outcomes statements.

A private comprehensive university reports that originally its efforts in outcomes assessment were decentralized, but they are now being directed by a single individual with widespread support from other members of the university community.

A public two-year institution with dwindling funding pointed out that it has increased its efforts to obtain external funding. Likewise, another two-year public college strengthened its Office of Planning and Institutional Research to enhance outcomes assessment activities. A private comprehensive university in Pennsylvania is redesigning administrative and academic structures to accommodate institutional research, data collection, and the implementation of an outcomes assessment plan, and it has revised its institutional priorities. At a private liberal arts college, the director of academic assessment has formed an assessment leadership team which includes a liaison to academic deans. A private comprehensive university is considering establishing a system of incentives for those who engage in outcomes assessment, and a public two-year college in New Jersey intends to provide faculty release time, hire consultants, and seek grant funding as a means of garnering resources for outcomes assessment.

Institutions with a Plan

Faculty. Institutions that have outcomes assessment programs in place report that issues relating to faculty involvement are the primary barrier to sustaining assessment activities, although they reported this barrier less frequently than institutions beginning the outcomes assessment process.

For a public two-year college, the issue was: "Faculty anxiety about being evaluated. We have tried to move ownership of the process and data to faculty, and we also routinely reassure them that the purpose of outcomes assessment is program evaluation, not faculty evaluation."

A public comprehensive university in New York stated: "There is faculty resistance (accountability and trust issues). We have developed a process that faculty/departments all are required to conduct assessment, follow the college assessment guideline, show evidence that program improvement/changes are considered based on the assessment data."

At a public liberal arts college in New Jersey, it was reported that faculty, in particular, have resisted quantification and applying across-the-board instruments to all students. "We have encouraged qualitative research and we have given programs great scope in tailoring instruments to meet their own needs in order to facilitate the assessment process."

Resources and Time. Not surprisingly, many institutions also identified financial and human resources, as well as time, as barriers to overcome, even though their assessment plans have been implemented.

A private, doctorate-granting institution in New Jersey stated the following: "Time and resources—not enough of either. Overcome somewhat in past few years by designation of an academic administration to oversee it and beefed up Institutional Research staff. The institution does not favor a highly bureaucratized, mechanistic assessment program. We regard our students' successful outcomes in the real world as more salient than portfolios.

A private liberal arts college in Pennsylvania cited time constraints on a very busy faculty as a barrier, along with a lack of awareness of assessment and its value, and the need for individual faculty to develop effective self assessment tools. Their efforts however, will result in a course-integrated model for the use of portfolios in the humanities, history, and social sciences in fall of 1995.

A public two-year college in New York saw as the main barrier, "[T]ime commitment. The process is a complex, time consuming one which extends over a period of years. It is difficult to maintain focus and ongoing motivation. Also, certain degree programs are more readily assessed and measured in terms of student outcomes than others. While progress has been realized in rewriting all program objectives and course objectives, measurement/appraisal instruments need

further attention.

Overcoming the Barriers. Many institutions stated ways in which they have attempted to overcome the difficulties and barriers to the successful implementation of assessment programs.

To overcome the barrier of human resources, a private specialized college in Pennsylvania stated: "Finding the needed human resources has been very difficult, because faculty and staff are limited and outcomes assessment can be quite labor-intensive. The primary strategy has been to ease into the process, adding one piece at a time and allowing sufficient time to adjust to each new addition.

A public comprehensive university in Maryland cited the lack of an assessment infrastructure, pointing out that the provost established a university Assessment Office, staffed with an assistant vice president; a University Assessment Council, which established assessment coordinators at the department level; and university-wide committees on assessment in general education and the majors, of which administrators are *ex-officio* members. The institution has worked to change the perception that the focus on assessment was solely for external reporting. The approved philosophy is that the purpose of the assessment program is to improve teaching and learning. Therefore, all policy statements and 21 "University Guiding Principles for Assessment" are based on this philosophy. To boost faculty morale, the University Assessment Council, in 1995, established Excellence in Assessment Awards.

Another public comprehensive university, this one in New Jersey, is beginning to overcome faculty resistance through assessment principles and practices that emphasize faculty initiative and ownership of the process and through more visible and tangible administrative support. According to a private specialized institution in Pennsylvania, faculty resistance has been overcome by making outcomes assessment part of program review, by incorporating program review into the university's governance structure, and by offering educational programs such as workshops.

Some wondered how outcomes assessment may be implemented at a multi-campus institution. A public two-year college in New York noted that it is a three-campus system, with each campus independently accredited and distinctively different in its age, stage of development, and service area characteristics. Such an institution represents both logistical and philosophical problems, which have been managed by having a single, college-wide assessment team, coordinated by a central academic vice president who develops and oversees the program.

A Role for CHE

Institutions without a plan were asked: How might CHE best assist your institution in the development of an institution-wide outcomes assessment plan? Institutions with a plan were asked: What assistance might CHE/MSA provide in support of your institutional assessment efforts? The open-ended responses offered suggestions for Commission materials that offered examples of assessment plans and their application to specific types of institutions, Commission-sponsored workshops, and the publication of standards, policies and/or guidelines.

Institutions without a Plan

At least 47 institutions without a plan (31 percent of respondents) requested that the Commission provide examples of effective outcomes assessment plans. These institutions want to review plans from other institutions as they develop their own plans.

The next most frequent request was for the Commission to sponsor workshops, conferences, or seminars on a routine basis.

Several institutions identified the need for the Commission to be clearer in its expectations of institutions regarding outcomes assessment. For example, a two-year public institution in Maryland called for specific requirements for (1) institution-wide outcomes, (2) program and course level outcomes to gauge effectiveness, (3) specific guidelines for learning outcomes, and (4) a policy statement or other public position on standardized testing.

In another instance, a public comprehensive university in New Jersey was more emphatic: "Require it...Force the issue, and we will have to respond!" Yet another view came from a private liberal arts college in New York: "If you want it, mandate it in clear and straightforward terms so that institutions can move forward, rather than wasting time trying to understand what needs to be done."

Other suggestions ranged from an institution in Puerto Rico requesting documents be printed in Spanish, to other institutions asking the Commission to provide handbooks or guides and to identify consultants who can assist the institutions.

Institutions with a Plan

It appears that even institutions in the midst of outcomes assessment want better clarification of the Commission's expectations for outcomes assessment. In addition, they want the Commission staff to share information about exemplary assessment programs and to sponsor workshops, conferences, and seminars on outcomes assessment.

Some institutions with a plan do not feel that the Commission is as clear as it should or could be in its expectations for outcomes assessment. This was the view of a private, proprietary institution in Pennsylvania that asked that CHE "clearly communicate your expectations regarding assessment standards." A public two-year college in New York stated that the Commission needs to be more insistent on comprehensive outcomes assessment as a primary criterion for Middle States re-accreditation. A major appeal by the Commission to academic leadership would provide more visible support—philosophically, structurally, and financially—to assessment and might enhance its status as an integral component of planning and policymaking.

Another way the Commission might be helpful, according to a public comprehensive institution in New York, would be to define the Commission's concept of outcomes assessment—in terms of goals, methodology, and focus—and make assessment a formal requirement of accreditation.

A private doctorate-granting university in Pennsylvania made the plea for the Commission to promote an understanding throughout the higher education community that a complex, comprehensive university needs to have a variety of assessment modalities, rather than a uniform, unilateral approach to program assessment. Programs for full and part-time students, for undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students, and with credit and non-credit offerings require different approaches to assessment within the same institution.

Institutions without a plan, as did those just beginning the assessment process, also felt that the Commission could be helpful by providing conferences, workshops, and seminars on outcomes assessment, and by publishing handbooks, guides, and databases that provide current information on outcomes assessment, including methods and instruments that might be used. There were many calls for examples, examples, examples! This perspective was captured in the suggestion from a public, comprehensive university in Pennsylvania: The Commission can provide support in a variety of ways, including: (1) emphasizing the importance of outcomes assessment in Middle States reviews and using data collected to serve our clients better; (2) providing Commission-sponsored workshops to promote outcomes assessment and to showcase good programs within the region; (3) providing limited consultation on outcomes assessment to universities, or at least helping them to identify consultants who can help; and (4) recognizing exemplary programs within the region.

Conclusion

The findings from the 1995 survey on outcomes assessment in the Middle States region provided several new insights and validated several previously held views that were based on an intuitive understanding of outcomes assessment as it is practiced in the region. These findings are based on both the quantitative data and responses to open-ended questions.

A Quantitative Snapshot

The survey revealed that over one-half of the institutions in the region have no institution-wide plan for outcomes assessment, and over one-half of those that do have a plan are public institutions. Over one-third of the institutions have had an assessment plan in operation for three or more years.

Most of the institutions that have a plan utilize some of the more direct measures of institutional effectiveness, but few emphasize direct measures of teaching and learning. Data are most routinely gathered on enrollment, retention, graduation, and attrition rates, but few concentrate on using the results of discipline content exams, basic skills, higher order skills, or student portfolios in an outcomes assessment program. Furthermore, while most institutions utilize nationally-normed tests, there is a significant interest in including locally-developed instruments in assessment programs.

The majority of institutions without a plan have completed no more than two or three of the nine steps considered prerequisite to developing a plan. The steps that have been completed generally involve some of the more mechanical tasks, such as developing inventories of instruments in use, but institutions generally have not tackled the more thorny issues of evaluating the effectiveness of those instruments or deciding which outcomes still need to be measured, beyond those that are already being measured.

Only a handful of institutions with a plan indicated that their assessments have led them to modify their goals and objectives comprehensively, although most have done so moderately. A large majority of institutions noted that they communicated assessment results to the campus by formal report or reports, while some did so only informally or selectively or in response to individual requests.

Faculty tend to be fully involved in developing assessment plans at most institutions, while academic administrators tend to be fully involved in the continuous administration of those plans. Faculty committees, rather than individual faculty, are deeply involved in analyzing assessment results, along with academic administrators. However, the participation of faculty and faculty committees declines significantly at the largest institutions, where the responsibility shifts to academic administrators and institutional researchers.

Perspectives on Implementation

Open-ended responses to questions on barriers to implementation and how they can be overcome indicated that the chief barriers to implementing new assessment activities or sustaining existing intitatives are faculty and resources. In addition, the Commission does have a role in promoting assessment within the region.

Faculty indifference, if not resistance, appears across institutional types, whether public or private, from research universities to liberal arts and community colleges. Faculty are viewed as generally suspicious of this activity, and it is a challenge for administrators and others to engage faculty successfully in the assessment process.

The next most often cited barrier to outcomes assessment is resources, both human and financial, with financial mentioned more frequently. Many institutions, especially in some states, are grappling with dwindling financial resources, and they maintain that these cutbacks are an impediment to outcomes assessment activities. Others cite limited staff and other personnel constraints as barriers. Nevertheless, most institutions have attempted to overcome the issue of resources and have begun to establish or are contining outcomes assessment within the limits of their resources.

Institutions indicated that they would like the Commission to assist by providing examples of effective assessment programs. While the Commission expects to satisfy the requests for workshops or seminars in the immediate future, a critical mass of information about programs that would be suitable as models is not readily available, and Commission staff will need to identify such examples. Institutions also should understand that the design of an outcomes assessment plan is unique to each institution, and a plan from another institution may not be appropriately utilized on another campus with significant adaptation. Each institution must conceptualize its own outcomes assessment program, based on its mission, goals, objectives, and resources. Staff also may be able to provide examples of institutions that have established cost-effective programs with limited resources.

Some institutions suggested that the Commission should clarify its expectations for outcomes assessment, and the Commission is developing both a policy statement and guidelines on the subject. Some respondents even requested the Commission to be more prescriptive in its expectations, although this suggestion cannot be accommodated within the letter or spirit of *Characteristics of Excellence* (1994), which is the Commission's primary statement of standards.

This survey indicates that outcomes assessment is of great importance to institutions in the Middle States region, they currently are in various stages of developing and implementing outcomes assessment plans, many institutions are working to overcome barriers to implementation, and all institutions need assistance from the Commission in this endeavor.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the 1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey, Commission staff makes the following recommendations:

1. The revised *Framework for Outcomes Assessment* should be advertised widely to institutions in the region, emphasizing its guidelines for approaching conceptual issues in the development of outcomes assessment plans.

2. The Commission should sponsor as many seminars as possible in the coming years to assist institutions with specific strategies for (a) completing the nine preliminary steps for developing a plan; (b) collegially developing a plan on campus; (c) the continuous administration of assessment plans; and (d) post-assessment strategies, involving incorporating assessment findings in long-range institututional planning and the self-study process as well as communicating those findings to all of the constituencies at various types of campuses.

3. Commission staff should provide Chairs and members of evaluation teams attending Commission-sponsored workshops with an update on the state of assessment in the region, how they should place the institution they are visiting in a framework of readiness to develop a plan or of effectiveness in administering an existing plan, and how best to evaluate what an institution realistically might be expected to accomplish in the five years between an evaluation visit and the following periodic review report.

4. The report on the 1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey should be published and disseminated to the membership and to selected constituents and interested organizations.

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